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ABSTRACT

Following a summary of research pertaining to the Montessori and Whole Language philosophies, this paper examines similarities between the two philosophies. Both philosophies are based on holistic learning, use cross-cultural materials, and stress the teacher's role as a facilitator within the classroom environment. The relationships of the Montessori and Whole Language philosophies to the reading process are then considered. Topics addressed include children's need to be exposed to a variety of teaching methods and the integration of reading and writing in the language arts. A discussion of methods of teaching reading in English as a Second Language classrooms considers the use of touch, sight, and sound; environments that encourage children to develop independence; the use of mixed ability groups; and lessons that involve interpersonal interaction. An appendix describes materials in the Montessori method which teachers can use to teach reading. A list of 21 references is provided. (SM)

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INTEGRATING MONTESSORI AND WHOLE LANGUAGE PHILOSOPHIES: METHODS OF READING IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

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Among teachers and other professional educators, there is a constant search for successful ideas and approaches to better help students learn and become productive, contributing adults in society. For the past four years, I have taught in an English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom. My classroom reflects my previous training and continued belief in the Montessori Method as well as my recent training and belief in the Whole Language philosophy.

My Montessori training, philosophical convictions, and my newly acquired graduate research training and knowledge of the Whole Language philosophy have been enlightening. I found that there are values and ideas in the Montessori and Whole Language philosophies which are similar if not identical. Therefore, I decided to offer relevant research to teachers on these philosophies and to discuss how they could be integrated in the ESL classroom.

The Montessori Philosophy: Summary of Research

The Montessori philosophy deals with the whole being--spiritual, emotional, and intellectual. It helps children become independent, moral adults (Montessori, 1970/1914; Standing, 1966; Lillard, 1973; Simons, 1988). The purpose of the first level of education is to help children become capable of acting independently and become responsible in their relationships to people and the environment. Children

desire to do things for themselves; Montessori advocates help children accomplish this task (Montessori, 1972; Lillard, 1973; Montessori, 1967). The main role of Montessori teachers is observer and facilitator. The children are rarely interrupted in self-endeavors (Montessori, 1970/1914; Yonemura, 1989).

The independence of children, and the instilling of a love of learning and of self-discovery were Dr. Montessori's ultimate goals. These goals are still espoused by present-day Montessorians. In order to work towards these goals, Montessori developed the prepared environment (Montessori, 1965). She felt the environment played a direct role in learning and designed materials which would allow for this growth to take place (Elkind, 1967).

The prepared environment is furnished with child-sized furniture. All of the materials are based on Montessori's principles of beauty and simplicity, isolation of difficulty, proceeding from simple to complex, and indirect preparation (Montessori, 1965; Lillard, 1973).

Montessori materials are self-correcting and designed for specific purposes (Lillard, 1973). The goal of the materials is the development of order, concentration, coordination, and independence. The materials are divided into three major areas: 1) Practical Life, which is designed to aid the child in

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mastering personal care and care of the environment; 2) Sensorial, which is designed to build perceptual skills; and 3) Academic, which concentrates on building the principles of reading, writing, mathematics, history, botany, and culture (Montessori, 1965).

The Whole Language Philosophy: Summary of Research

The Whole Language philosophy professes that language is a communication of meaning (Goodman, 1986; Altwerger, Edelsky, & Flores, 1987). By combining the deeper language of thought and the surface language of speaking, reading and writing, Whole Language enables children to have more meaningful language experiences both in and out of classrooms. Whole Language helps children to learn in a virtually risk-free environment. It encourages independence to learn from as many different sources as possible. Whole Language deals with the "whole" child. Learning comes through first-hand experiences (Altwerger, Edelsky, & Flores, 1987; Goodman, 1986; Brand, 1989). The role of teachers in the Whole Language classroom is one of collaborator and observer. The interactive learning environment is structured so that learning takes place naturally, by doing, rather than by direct instruction (Goodman, 1986).

The Montessori and Whole Language Philosophies: Similarities

The Montessori and the Whole Language philosophies are both based on holistic learning and cross-cultural materials. Both philosophies emphasize providing the environment necessary to learn naturally. Both philosophies see the teacher's role as facilitator within this environment. In both philosophies respect for each other and the environment are of major importance (Gajdusek, 1988; Heald-Taylor, 1989; Montessori, 1970/1914). In order to reflect these philosophies the ESL classroom needs to be inviting, comfortable, exciting, structured, prepared, and organized.

Montessori and Whole Language: The Relationship to the Reading Process

The Whole Language philosophy of reading follows a psycholinguistic and psychological view of the reading and writing process (Goodman, Smith, Meredith, & Goodman, 1987; Heald-Taylor, 1989; Reutzel & Hollingsworth, 1988; Pickering, 1989). For example, children are immersed in a print-rich environment; learning expands on experiences and schema relevant to learners. Reinforcement is positive, as the abilities and background of each child are respected. Learning takes place at the pace needed. Reading and writing are treated as complementary processes of equal

importance and authorship is emphasized. Whole Language further emphasizes meaningful learning, using the learner's interests to expand literacy.

Children need to be exposed to a variety of teaching methods such as direct instruction, indirect instruction, peer tutoring, group and individual work, and to a variety of instructional materials including but not limited to concrete manipulatives, trade books, literature, newspapers, and magazines (Goodman, 1986).

The Montessori philosophy of reading which sees the integration of reading and writing as a basic and necessary component to the language arts program is very similar to that of Whole Language. It respects children, allowing for learning at individual rates. Montessori was the first to advocate writing first, then reading later (Elliot, 1967; Prendergast, 1969; Montessori, 1970/1914, 1967; Standing, 1966; Chomsky, 1971; Lillard, 1973). While part of Montessori is based on phonics, it also incorporates the acting out of stories, making speeches and authorship of writings. Montessori theorized that there are sensitive periods when children are ready for the acquisition of reading. By using the children's background experiences, their desires to learn, and their ability to use language, the Montessori teacher moves them naturally into the experience of reading and writing.

There are many facets to the Montessori Method of teaching reading. Children are taught the sounds of letters in concert with tracing their forms on sandpaper letters. They are simultaneously being exposed to a print-rich environment and encouraged toward self-discovery (Elliot, 1967; Prendergast, 1969; Montessori, 1970/1914, 1967; Lillard, 1973; Standing, 1966). Children are encouraged to work individually and cooperatively as learning takes place naturally. Typically, Montessori children do not recall learning how to read (Lillard, 1973).

The Whole Language approach to reading incorporates reading and writing using children's experiences as a base for learning (Goodman, 1986). Phonics are taught in context with the literature being used and as a by-product of reading rather than pre-requisite skills (Reutzel & Hollingsworth, 1988). As in the Montessori Method, children work individually and cooperatively with encouragement toward self-discovery (Goodman, 1986; Pickering, 1989; Goodman, Smith, Meredith, & Goodman, 1987).

The Montessori Method permits reading and writing in concert through the use of sandpaper letters, colored alphabets, composition writing, object boxes, and matching cards (see appendix). Whole Language involves the teaching of reading and writing in context with meaningful and comprehensible input through the

use of modeling, literature, newspapers, magazines, and composition writing. Composition writing in both Montessori and Whole Language begins with the children drawing pictures and then dictating the story while the teacher writes down what they say. The children begin to progress by writing numbers, letters, or whatever they can, and reading the story to the teacher or to the class. Gradually they work up to single words, phrases, sentences and eventually, paragraphs. Inventive spelling is encouraged and rarely corrected. When the children get to the point of writing compositions with the black alphabet, any correction that is done, is done before the children write them on paper. They then illustrate their composition.

Methods of Teaching Reading: Empowering Children in ESL Classrooms

I believe that a blending of the Montessori and Whole Language philosophies and methodologies in the English as a Second Language classroom would empower children to become literate in both their first and second languages.

Both the Montessori and Whole Language approaches encourage the use of kinesthetics (touch, sight and sound) as methods of teaching, allowing for children to advance at their own pace. Risks are encouraged and corrections are not made overtly. Through modeling and practice the language is learned and refined.

Both philosophies encourage working with the "whole" child by providing a risk-free environment, which encourages the development of independence and freedom of choice, and by respecting individuals and their backgrounds. This risk-free environment also encourages students to work at their own rate as well as in cooperative and collaborative learning situations.

In such a classroom, mixed ability groups can learn together and peer tutoring is encouraged. The development of oral language, reading and writing skills is integrated (Heald-Taylor, 1989; Chattin-McNichols, 1981). Resources such as National Geographic (including the magazine, filmstrips, videos and teacher kits), wordless books, recipes, guest speakers, realia, and group projects are useful. These are used in conjunction with the Montessori materials which provide for individual and small group lessons.

During group time our lessons are very much an interactive process. We read stories, discuss vocabulary, make up our own endings, write about the story or create one that is similar. Sometimes we discuss how this story may be similar to a real-life experience. If there is a message in the story, we discuss it. We may take several days to "read" one story. There are materials available to the children to write their own stories (the composition alphabet

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can be used by those whose competency in handwriting is still lacking or for those who prefer writing their stories this way first before putting it down on paper).

While the children do individual work using the Montessori materials, there is also a lot of interaction in the classroom. They are free, in fact encouraged, to help each other, to solve problems, or just to share the joy of a new discovery with others.

One particularly successful project that the children enjoyed was making clay and using it for snake pots. First, the children made clay by reading and following the recipe. We used Montessori's three period lesson (see appendix) to learn the terms and the names of the ingredients and utensils needed. After making the clay, the group had to decide on the steps needed, and their order, so that their snake pots would be made correctly.

To The Teacher

I believe that using both approaches in the ESL classroom would indeed be a powerful way to guide children in their learning. Giving students the freedom to choose and allowing them to work together in groups, whether large or small, in their native language as well as in English, would open the door for learning to take place.

If you as a teacher are interested in implementing Montessori and Whole Language reading strategies in your ESL classroom, the place to begin would be reading the many books, available to you through you public or university library, written by and about Maria Montessori. There is much to absorb about her philosophy. Understanding what she perceived about children is a necessary starting place. You will also want to read what you can about Whole Language and attend any conferences, seminars and/or workshops that are available to you.

I have found using strategies from both of these philosophies to be very rewarding, both for the children that I serve, and for me. I hope that you, too, will find these same rewards.

Future Directions

There is still considerable work to be done. Time, consistent use of these philosophies together, and research will provide more insights on how successful a Montessori-Whole Language program could be. At our school, our hope is to continue with the program and to witness positive results in the children's language acquisition.

APPENDIX

Montessori Materials for Teachers

Concrete Manipulatives

Concrete manipulatives are materials that the children use to help them visualize the concept being learned. These materials contain a control of error so that any mistakes can be seen and corrected. Examples of concrete manipulatives used in our program are: the Pink Tower which consists of 10 blocks increasing in 1 cm. increments; the Constructive Triangles which are used to form other shapes such as the rhombus, rectangle, or parallelogram; the Brown Stair which is used to demonstrate width; and the Red Rods which are used to demonstrate length. In both the Brown Stair and the Red Rods, the smallest prism is used as a check to make sure the order is correct.

Sandpaper Letters

The sounds of the letters are taught in a hierarchy (from most easily pronounced to the most difficult) using sandpaper letters which children trace with two fingers while saying the sound. This enables them to visually, tactically and aurally learn each letter. The letters are first taught in lower case.

Colored Alphabets

The colored alphabets are cardboard cutouts of the letters. The red and blue alphabet is used to teach phonetic words. The vowels are blue and the consonants are red. The children subconsciously become aware that

all words in English must contain at least one vowel. The black alphabet contains all 26 letters and is used for writing compositions and also in conjunction with the other colored alphabets. The orange alphabet is used to teach consonant digraphs. The digraph pattern is in orange and the rest of the word is in black. The children see the pattern and eventually they can move away from this concrete form into the more abstract with the black alphabet alone. The blue and black alphabet is used for long vowels, the green and black for low back vowels (i.e. le), the purple and black for diphthongs, the pink and black for r-controlled vowels (er, or, ar, ir, etc.) and the yellow and black for the r-controlled digraphs (iar, are, ear, etc.) Children always read and write what they have manipulated with the colored alphabets.

Object Boxes

The object boxes are used to learn initial sounds. Boxes for each letter of the alphabet contain small objects whose name begins with that particular initial sound. Small children start out with just one box and eventually work their way up to mixing up three or more boxes at a time. The letter is placed at the top of their work area and the objects are lined up under the correct initial sound.

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Matching Cards

Matching cards are used in not only the language area, but also in the sensorial and cultural areas. They are first used as letter or word recognition. Reading, per se, does not necessarily take place. There are picture cards with the word at the bottom and the children must find the word card by itself and match it to the picture/word card. They can look at the picture and "read" the word. After doing the work repeatedly, they begin to recognize the word in other contexts. Eventually they match word cards to picture cards that do not have the word at the bottom and reading is taking place.

Three Period Lesson

Montessori's three period lesson consists of three steps, the first being "This is." The teacher introduces two or three objects and says "This is _____. Say _____." She does this for all of the objects. The second step is "Show me." The teacher reintroduces the objects using the first step. Then she says "Show me _____." or "Point to _____." When the child has successfully accomplished this task, the teacher enters the third step which asks "What is?" After going through steps one and two again, she asks "What is this?" as she points to one of the objects. She does this for all of the objects presented.

The three steps may be accomplished in one sitting or over the course of several sittings depending on the complexity of what is being presented. The third step is used only when the teacher is sure the child can answer successfully.

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